

## Figeroa's Journey

By Natalie Ochoa

Figeroa woke up sweating on a warm winter morning. He had a nightmare—a bad one. He dreamed he was accused of killing a man and shooting him with a firearm. How evil.

He rose from his bed and began preparing for the day. He cleaned his shoes, brushed his teeth, and ensured he looked presentable. Figeroa was gay.

He preferred men, something he had always known about himself. Despite this, he was a very clean and polite person, traits he likely inherited from his father.

At the time, being openly gay was still not widely understood. Many people saw it as a social issue, something to be debated or ridiculed. Some even dismissed it as absurd.

Inside, Figeroa struggled. He didn't want to be gay. He wasn't into Judaism or rap music, and he was drifting further away from religion. It was a time when the demand for cheap labor and poor working conditions was beginning to push hardworking, honest men out of their jobs.

My faith had been tested before, but I wanted to trust Figeroa.

I had known him all my life, and I couldn't believe he was changing so drastically. If he stayed gay, he wouldn't be accepted at church, and that worried me.

I prayed a lot, believing in angels and divine guidance.

Despite my beliefs, I decided to stand by Figeroa. I struggled with my own doubts, as I believed being gay was wrong, but I couldn't abandon my friend.

Life was tough for him. People often gave him judgmental looks, and being around him was always challenging.

Even so, I kept reading the Bible and praying. Figeroa was always in my prayers.

Later, he joined the church and took inventory of his personal battles. He confided in me that he saw his struggles as a war—a fight against evil men who had put his home into debt.

He became a strong man and, eventually, no longer identified as gay.

God helped him see through the fog and overcome his insecurities.

He inspired me to become a better person.

I don't know why any one accused Figeroa of killing a man.

It's not the first time in my life I have seen public injustice.

I will persevere as things get better.

## Figeroa's Journey

By Natalie Ochoa

Figeroa woke up sweating on a warm winter morning, shaken by a nightmare—a terrible one. In his dream, he was accused of murder, of shooting a man in cold blood. The thought of it horrified him.

Shaking off the lingering fear, he rose from his bed and began preparing for the day. He polished his shoes, brushed his teeth, and ensured he looked presentable. Figeroa was a man of routine and discipline, traits he likely inherited from his father.

Figeroa was also gay.

He had always known this about himself, though it was not something he shared openly. At the time, being gay was not widely understood. Many saw it as a moral failing, a subject of debate or ridicule. Some dismissed it outright as an absurdity.

Inside, Figeroa wrestled with his identity. He didn't want to be gay. He wasn't religious, nor was he particularly drawn to mainstream culture. Meanwhile, the world around him was changing—working-class men like him were being pushed out by economic hardship and social shifts.

My faith had been tested before, but I wanted to trust Figeroa.

I had known him all my life, and I struggled to understand the changes I saw in him. If he remained openly gay, he would never be accepted at church, and that worried me. I prayed often, seeking guidance from angels and divine wisdom.

Yet, despite my beliefs, I chose to stand by my friend. I wrestled with my own doubts, believing that his way of life was wrong, but I could not abandon him.

Life was difficult for Figeroa. People judged him, their eyes heavy with silent disapproval. Even being seen with him felt like an act of defiance.

Still, I kept reading my Bible, praying for him every night.

In time, Figeroa returned to the church, seeking meaning in his struggles. He confided in me that he saw his personal battles as a war—not against himself, but against the forces that had put his home in debt and left his future uncertain.

Through faith, he grew stronger. In the end, he no longer identified as gay.

He told me that God had lifted the fog, helping him overcome his doubts and fears.

Figeroa's journey changed me as well. He inspired me to become a better person.

I still don't know why anyone accused him of murder.

It wasn't the first time I had witnessed public injustice.

But I will persevere, believing that, in time, things will get better.